

JAROSŁAW BODZEK, KAMIL KOPIJ, EMILIA SMAGUR

Finds of Roman Coins in Poland – Lesser Poland. Preliminary Report

Introduction

The project “*Finds of Roman Coins in Poland – Lesser Poland*” is part of the larger project “*Finds of Roman Coins in Poland and connected historically with PL*” (FRC PL), directed by Professor Aleksander Bursche from the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw and funded by a grant from “*The National Programme for the Development of Humanities*” of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education¹. Its timescale runs from 2013 to 2017. The project’s aim is to create an online database that gathers into one place all material associated with Roman coin finds from both Poland and some regions of neighbouring countries that once formed part of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth (East Galicia = NW Ukraine and the Duchy of Prussia = the Sambia Peninsula)². A further target is to prepare five volumes of Roman coin find inventories (which will adhere to the best international standards for the cataloguing of coins) for publication. These will focus on coins from Greater Poland and Kuyavia, Masuria, the Suwałki region and Sambia, Western Masovia, and Lesser Poland and East Galicia and will include a supplement on coin finds registered on Polish territory before 2015³. The creation of a full catalogue of Polish finds will signify the completion of the project. In terms of chronological range, the project covers coin finds of Republican, Imperial, Provincial and Early Byzantine origin, ranging from the 3rd century BC to the 6th century AD. Several scholars (as well as postgraduate and graduate students) from leading Polish and Ukrainian universities and museums are involved. The final aim of the project is to equip a new generation of young archaeologists and numismatists with crucial practical skills and to provide them with valuable experience. The team working on finds in Lesser Poland includes Jarosław Bodzek, Kamil Kopij, Emilia Smagur, Jerzy Kliś and postgraduate students studying at the Department of Classical Archaeology of

the Jagiellonian University – Szymon Jellonek, Barbara Zajac and Paulina Koczwara.

1. FRC PL Database

The database software, created in cooperation with the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut and Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt, has been adapted to our specific needs. For instance, it permits the usage of local historical names and diverse administrative divisions in different languages, which is especially important in the case of modern Ukraine and the Kaliningrad district territory. The database, which will continue to be added to, is intended to serve as a tool for both search queries and statistical analysis and includes a function that can export data as CSV files. This export of data enables the mapping of finds thanks to multiple applications such as Google fusion tables, qGIS, Google Maps and cartodb. It is also compatible with the software used by many similar projects in Europe, such as Fundmünzen der Antike (FdA). Apart from detailed coin form information (which contains basic information about the coin itself), details may also be found on place, findspot and context, as well as on the collection to which it belongs. The database can be searched either by geographical location (levels: region, province, county, parish, place, archaeological site) or by coin details (function, period, denomination, material, issuer, mint, date, weight, diameter and legend). However, as it is still a work in progress, other search categories may be added in future. The database cooperates with both “The Oxford Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire Project” and nomisma.org (run by the American Numismatic Society). Coins from Die Fundmünzen der Römischen Zeit will also be included into the standardised system. In addition, the database is able to export data to other coin databases and will serve not only numismatists, but also historians and archaeologists. It will also be a very useful tool in the study of economic and political contact between the Roman Empire and the Barbaricum. Finally, it will allow researchers to conduct analysis on the importance of the impact that ancient Mediterranean cultures had on the inhabitants of Poland in ancient times. The open source database will be available online to both Polish and foreign researchers.

2. Lesser Poland: An outline of its research history

Interest in Roman coin finds in Lesser Poland began long ago. The earliest mentions of finds in the area

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² On the project cf. Bursche 2013.

³ Finds from Pomerania, Silesia and Eastern Masovia are already published. Cf respectively Ciolek 2007, 2008 and Romanowski 2008.

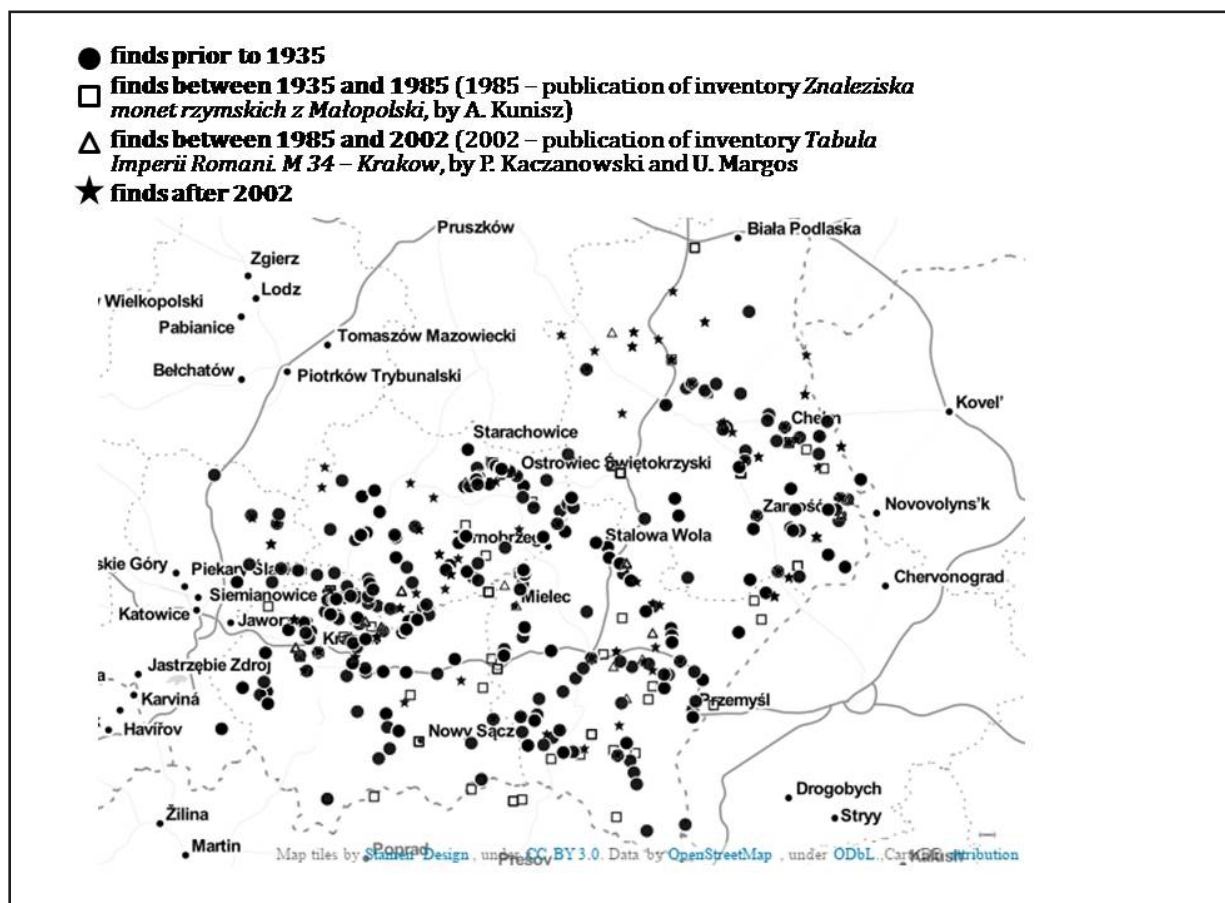


Fig. 1 Map of the findspots of Roman coins in Lesser Poland (by Kamil Kopij & Emilia Smagur).

date back to the 15th or 16th century A.D.⁴, with the first published lists of such discoveries dating to the late 18th and early 19th centuries⁵. A systematic recording of Lesser Poland finds started after the end of the 19th century before the reporting of monetary finds became more commonplace in the first half of the 20th century⁶. There was a further intensification in research into the influx of Roman coins in the second half of the 20th century, which subsequently led to a rise in the number of recorded Roman monetary finds⁷. In the 21st century, the rise in popularity of metal detector searches has thus far caused a rapid increase in uncontrolled (unregistered) finds. A successful attempt to extend the formal registration of Roman coins found in this way was made by A. Dymowski⁸. In summary, it may be stated that Lesser Poland is one of the Polish regions where the registration of

Roman coin finds has a long history. This has resulted in the creation of three inventories⁹, which have been completed to a high level of proficiency.

3. FMR PL Lesser Poland

The state of research mentioned above, alongside the high density of finds in Lesser Poland, means that “*Finds of Roman Coins in Poland – Lesser Poland*” can be considered one of the most important parts of the FRC PL project. The term Lesser Poland is understood here as the historical region of Poland as mapped in the inventory of Andrzej Kunisz¹⁰. This includes the entire modern day voivodships of Małopolskie and Podkarpackie, as well as parts of the Lubelskie, Świętokrzyskie and Śląskie voivodships. The chronological parameters are marked by the beginning of the influx of Roman Coins into the area in c. 1st century BC up to the 6th century A.D., when the arrival of early Byzantine coins is noted¹¹. The aim of the *FRC PL Lesser Poland* project is to both collate and verify Roman coin finds that have already been published and to register discoveries of new, unpublished finds

⁴ Abramowicz 1981.

⁵ [Bandtkie] 1824; cf. Kolendo 2006.

⁶ Cf. Friedrich 1909; Piotrowicz 1927/28; 1934; 1935; 1936; Majewski 1949.

⁷ Cf. Gumowski 1958; Kunisz 1969; 1973; 1985; Kokowski 1984; Godłowski 1985; Bursche 1988; 1996; 1998; Madyda-Legutko 1995; 1996; 2004; Mączyńska 1998; Morawiecki 1999; Kaczanowski - Margos 2002; Bodzek 2009.

⁸ Summarized in Dymowski 2011.

⁹ Cf. Kunisz 1969; 1985; Kaczanowski - Margos 2002.

¹⁰ Cf. Kunisz 1969; 1985.

¹¹ Cf. Wołoszyn 2009.

from the territory of Lesser Poland¹². It should be noted that not only finds made during regular archaeological research will be incorporated into the project, but also information gleaned from library and archive study, as well as coins discovered by chance or by 'detectorists'. All data will first be added to the *FRC PL* online database and subsequently published as an inventory of finds in book form. The initial results of work carried out up until 31 December 2015 are presented below.

4. FMR PL Lesser Poland -Preliminary Report

The work of the FRC PL Lesser Poland team conducted since 2013 has resulted in the addition of a total of 9,149 records from 241 places and 406 findspots to the database. This is a significant increase in volume on the Kunisz (1985) and Kaczanowski – Margos (2002) inventories (Fig. 1). Compared to the former, the increase in the number of registered find spots is c. 14.5 % and to the second 14.3%. 95 hoards, 21 tomb finds and 63 settlement finds are listed, with the remainder made up of stray finds. The overwhelmingly predominant group consists of imperial *denarii* and *denarii subaerati* (8,422), constituting 92.1% of all finds (Fig. 2). Other groups contain 223 Republican *denarii* (2.4%), 88 4th century *aes* (0.96%), 39 3rd century *antoniniani* 39 (0.43%), 36 1st and 2nd century AD *aes*, 24 *aurei* (0.26 %) and 15 *solidi* (0.16%) (Fig. 3). Only a few finds of early Byzantine and Roman Provincial coins and gold Roman medallions have been registered. A group of nine pierced or looped coins were also identified.

The picture that emerges from the information gathered in the database is consistent with the particular nature of Roman coin finds in the Malopolska region. During the late pre-Roman and Roman period, the majority of the territory of Lesser Poland was inhabited by people of the Przeworsk culture¹³. Its easternmost part contained settlements of the Wielbarsk culture, whilst the influence of both Puchowska and Dacian culture can be

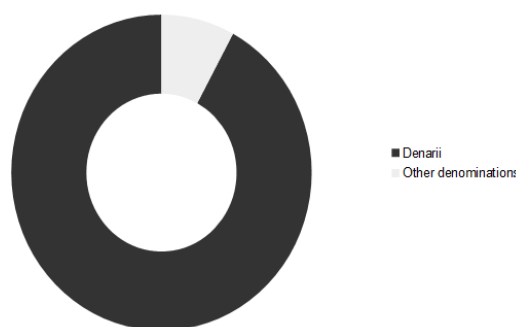


Fig. 2 Frequency of denarii, subaerati and other denominations amongst the finds in Lesser Poland (by Kamil Kopij).

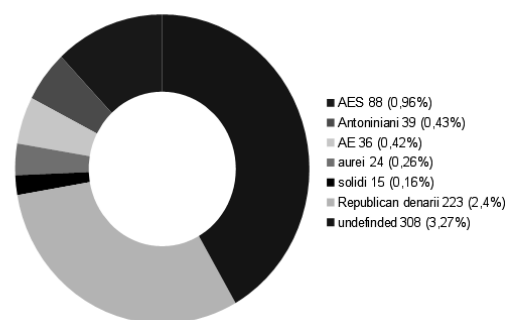


Fig. 3 Frequency of denominations other than denarii amongst the finds in Lesser Poland (by Kamil Kopij).

identified on its southern and south-eastern edges. As is the case with the remainder of the territory to the north of the Carpathian Mountains, the influx of Roman coins to Lesser Poland can be linked with political contact between the Romans and the Barbarians. The streams of coins that flowed into the region were mostly brought as gifts for the elite, tributes, ransoms for captives, donatives and to make annual or military payments to Barbarians¹⁴. Medallions, which were used as a symbol of power and prestige by the Germanic elite, probably

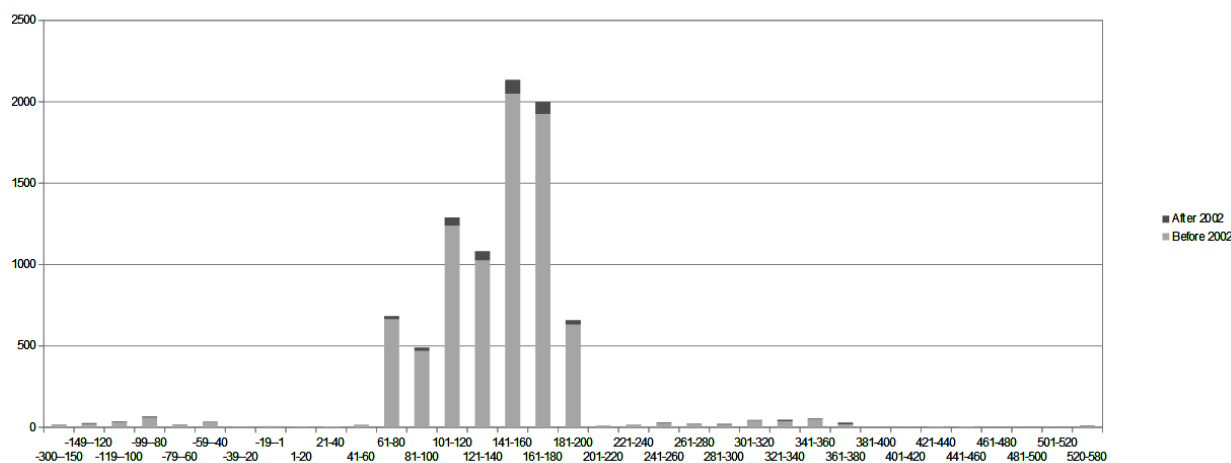


Fig. 4 Inflow of Roman coins to the Lesser Poland area in 20 year intervals (by Kamil Kopij).

¹² Cf. Bodzek – Smagur – Lach – Kopij 2014.

¹³ Kaczanowski - Kozłowski 1998, p. 279 ff.

¹⁴ Kolendo 1998.

came to the territory in the form of gifts for Barbarian rulers in return for their support of Roman policy¹⁵. Silver coins, especially imperial *denarii* dating to the 1st-2nd century AD, are the most frequently discovered in the area, which is a common trait in most of the former territory of the Central and Eastern European Barbaricum¹⁶. Other groups of coins are far less numerous. The beginning of the influx of republican *denarii* started in the 1st c. BC, albeit in comparatively small amount (Fig. 4)¹⁷. Despite the existence of the Amber Route, Roman currency probably did not play an important role as a medium of exchange during this period¹⁸. A reduction in the influx of Roman coins can be observed after the reign of Augustus and finds of coins dating to the Julio-Claudian dynasty from Lesser Poland are very rare¹⁹. Coins minted by Flavian (including some of the Republican *denarii*) and especially the Antonine dynasty are found more frequently and most of them entered the area in the last decades of the 2nd century AD and the beginning of the 3rd century AD. Among the hoard finds, the predominance of Antoninus Pius coins may be noted, whilst Traian coins are the most common amongst stray finds²⁰. In the 3rd century AD, a marked reduction in the influx of Roman coins can be observed, as well as some changes to the structure of the finds, with the proportion of gold coins slightly increasing. A resurgence in the number of coins entering the area can be dated to the reign of the Constantinian and Valentinian dynasties, although in this period the vast majority of finds are bronze. In the second half of the 4th century, a more intense influx of gold *solidi* can be observed. This is also the case with the first half of the 5th century AD, when *solidi* and small bronze coins came to dominate. The end of the transfer of Roman coins to the territory of Lesser Poland can be dated to the middle of the 5th century A.D.²¹ After a break of several dozen years, a new wave of early Byzantine coins reached the territory, during the reign of Justinian I (527-565)²². This continued over the following centuries²³, but this period is outside the remit of the project.

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¹⁵ Bursche 1998.

¹⁶ Bursche 2004.

¹⁷ Dymowski - Myzgin 2014.

¹⁸ Kunisz 1969, p. 57.

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²⁰ Romanowski 2010.

²¹ Cf. Bodzek 2009.

²² Wołoszyn 2009.

²³ Kunisz 1969.

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